**Ready for Mastery?**

***By Aimee Bernstein, Author of Stress Less Achieve More & CEO of Open Mind Adventures***



Visualize LeBron James as he leaps for the basket; Alisha Keyes at the piano singing *This* *Girl is On Fire*; a Navy Seal as he jumps out of a helicopter and races towards Bin Laden's hide-out. What do they have in common?

All of them are masters of performing under pressure. Although we tend to think first of [sports](http://www.selfgrowth.com/sports.html) figures, entertainers and warriors, in truth all of us have our moments when under enormous pressure something clicks and we say or do something impeccably. Maybe it's on the freeway, when you skillfully avoid hitting the car that cuts in front of you. Maybe it's in the midst of a heated team discussion when you calmly state the deeper truth that redirects the conversation into a more productive conversation. Or maybe, when feeling the pressure of market expectations and global competition, a break-through idea comes to you that leads to a powerful new technology.

Most of the time you don't know how you performed such mastery -- it seems to just occur. Yet, in these moments you are aligning your mind/body/energy field in a way that generates [peak performance](http://www.selfgrowth.com/peak_performance.html) and well-being. If you can identify this process and apply it to all your activities, can you imagine the elevated life that is possible? In this brief article I'll share an important element of this process, which is attention or focused awareness.

Throughout our lives, teachers, parents, and now mindfulness gurus have urged us to pay attention. Yet, few of us have been taught how to do this; we are just supposed to know. In fact, most of us are often unaware of where our attention is until someone or something--like the coffee table we bump into--wakes us up. It's like having a dog that escapes from the house or hides under the bed and we have no idea that it's missing until we start looking for it. Mastery begins with metaphorically finding the dog or knowing where our attention is located.

There are three basic [habits](http://www.selfgrowth.com/habits.html) of attention which I discuss in my book *Stress Less Achieve More*. I've learned through years of training in aikido, a martial art that teaches the harmonious resolution of conflict, that wherever you place your attention becomes your center--the place from which you perceive and operate. The three basic [habits](http://www.selfgrowth.com/habits.html) are locating your attention: (1) outside yourself in another person or situation: (2) inside yourself (3) blending your attention with another's. For purposes of this article let's examine the first two beginning with locating your attention outside yourself. Consider this...

One evening my aikido teacher, Robert Nadeau, attacked me with a strike to the head. I countered and he went down. But then, just for a split second, I shifted my attention to him in order to see how well I did. In the next moment I found myself splattered on the mat. *Did you get it?* he asked. Yup. I got it.

You see as soon as you locate your attention outside of yourself in another person or situation, you lose your ground, power and sense of self. Without recognizing it, you become dependent on others for energy, recognition or approval. As you've located your center in them, you'll know what the other person feels, needs, thinks, and/or wants, but you may be unsure about your own thoughts, feelings, needs or wants. Even though you may pride yourself on being a great help to others, when your attention is located in them over time you'll find yourself energetically depleted and behind in your own work. Similarly, if your attention is tethered to your smart phone you will be digitally connected to others but probably have lost a deep connection with yourself. Bottom-line, the more your energy streams of attention are hooked to people and things in your environment, the more you can get disconnected from your own energy source.

A second habit is locating your attention inside yourself. There are two variations of this-- closed or open attention. Let' start with closed attention, which infers a closing down to the outside world.

As you know, all of us need time away from others in order to reflect and recharge. However, when disassociating from others becomes a habit, it may manifest as closing down to another's point of view, armoring your heart and/or observing, judging or projecting onto others rather than engaging with them. I am reminded of the in-his-head supervisor who abruptly ended the performance evaluation meeting he was conducting because his employee was crying and he didn't know how to handle it.

In the moments when your attention is inside yourself but closed down to others you know what you think , feel, need and/or want but may not have a clue what the other person thinks, feels, needs or wants. Often people with this habit are unaware of the depth to which their words and actions affect others. Depending on how extreme this habit of attention they may believe they must disengage or move against others in order to be safe, in control and get what they want. However, there is a better option.

Health, happiness and high performance begins with locating your attention inside yourself and extending your energy to embrace others. It is from this internally centered yet open position that we are best able to perform well, access our intuition and [creativity](http://www.selfgrowth.com/creativity.html), and establish positive relationships with others. It is in these moments that we are more likely to enter "the zone" and become one with the flow.

In truth, all of us operate from all three ways of attending within the course of a day, yet we have a habit or tendency towards one of them. To achieve high performance and quality of life when under pressure, you need to identify and shift your [habits](http://www.selfgrowth.com/habits.html) of attention when they are limiting you. So this month, find the time to check in with yourself every day. It only takes a minute.

Notice whether your attention is outside or inside yourself. Is your attention closed down so you feel tense, burdened and small or is it open and extended in order to invite the muses, connections, and opportunities into your life. Also notice what triggers these tendencies. Then, if your attention is outside yourself, call it back. Like a well trained dog it will come. Or, if you are closed down, find your smile and let your energy radiate like the sun 360 degrees around you. Keep a record of how this internal shift affects your mood, [motivation](http://www.selfgrowth.com/motivation.html), relationships, and performance. You may be pleasantly surprised.

**Author's Bio:**

**Aimee Bernstein,** President of **Open Mind Adventures**, is a change accelerator specializing in leadership, organization and personal development and a trail blazer in the area of mindfulness- in-action. Her book ***Stress Less Achieve More : Simple Ways to Turn Pressure into a Positive Force in Your Life*** guides busy leaders and their teams how to use pressure--the energy of change-- to develop self-mastery and high performance. A psychotherapist with thirty-five years of experience, Aimee integrates psychology, best business practices and the mind/body/energy principles of aikido to guide people in how to quickly shift moods, expand confidence and presence and re-center themselves when difficult people or situations throw them off balance.

Aimee has worked with senior and emerging leaders from such organizations as the Ritz Carlton Hotel Company, Microsoft, Novartis Latin America, Dolce & Gabbana, The Port of Singapore Authority, MasterCard, and The University of Texas at Austin. Her state of the art work empowers people to lead and live more authentically, enabling them to reach new levels of high performance, increase innovation, and forge stronger relationships. Aimee is listed in *Who’s Who in American Women*.